

THE OTHER MANS GRASS ...

Italian car garages have come in for quite a bit of stick over the years and none more so than main dealers. Some of this criticism has quite rightly been levelled and certain other nationalities have equally been held up to be shining examples of how things should be done. However, after so many years of running nothing but Italian cars, having first one and now two non-Italians has allowed a different perspective on how others do it. The experience has generally been a positive one, although I recently saw the other side of the coin.

The franchise in question has an imposing site beside a motorway and is located conveniently near to a slip road. This turned out to be the first problem, as despite its proximity it was very difficult to work out just how to gain access to the spacious area which it occupies and it was only at the third attempt that I did so (the second took me to a rival carmaker – they must love it!).

As many of you will be aware, upon entering the cathedral-like edifices which are contemporary car showrooms there is often a desk with staff to greet you and direct your enquiry. On this occasion the desk was there but totally unmanned and the being looking down on me from a balcony appeared disinclined to get involved either. Wading into the sea of shining metal I managed to find a salesperson hiding behind a PC who directed me to the parts department which I was seeking.

Getting there involved retracing my steps to the entrance, leaving the building, walking the remaining width of its frontage and then along its side. There, hidden behind some vans was my goal, opposite the vehicle washing bays. Still, it was raining anyway so a little extra moisture was of no consequence.

I entered and explained that I wished to purchase a seal and would like someone to take a look at the car to confirm that the one on the printout I was holding was the correct one, it being expensive and non-returnable. I said that I would go back and fetch the car while he looked it up and duly returned after further exercise. It then transpired that the man I had been dealing with was only the van driver and he passed me over to a specialist, although only in customer alienation.

The gist of our conversation which followed was that I asked him to look at the car, while he maintained that it would have to go into their workshops and be stripped down before anything was ordered – and from another country too. In vain did I point out that since it was an external seal there was no stripping to do, as he could see if he walked a few yards. He was adamant that he would not look at it and only repeated what he had already said.

Feeling that I was about to start fighting with someone for refusing to take my money I simply left and let them to carry on doing whatever it is that they pretend to do there. The whole experience had been poor right from the start, so let's just bear in mind that if a huge investment from a quality marque only served to alienate me perhaps the Italians, while not always getting it absolutely right, can certainly get it a lot less wrong than some.

MJB